**Close Reading of a Literary Passage**

Follow these three stages of close reading using *specific* questions in each domain to guide your analysis. Not all questions are important ALL of the time. The more closely you can *observe*, the more original and exact your ideas will be.

**Examine—The WHAT**

* What is the first thing you notice about the passage?
* What is the second thing? What do you visualize as you read?
* How do the two things you noticed complement each other? Or contradict each other?
* What mood does the passage create in you as a reader? How?
* Which words do you notice first? How and why do they stand out from the others?
* How do the important words relate to one another? Does a phrase here appear elsewhere in the writing?
* Do any words seem oddly used to you? Why? Is that a result of archaic (dated) language? Or deliberate weirdness?
* Do any words have double meanings? What are all the possible ways to read them (connotation)?
* Look up any unfamiliar words. Consider secondary meanings of common words as well.

**Analyze—The HOW**

* How does an image here remind you of an image elsewhere in the text?
* How does descriptive language appeal to your five senses? Does this imagery form a pattern? Why might the author have chosen that color, sound or physical description? Is it symbolic? Is it foreshadowing?
* What is the dominant imagery (those descriptions that appeal to your five senses—sight, sound, touch, smell, and taste) and how is it used?
* How is rhythm used? Are sentences short and choppy? Long and flowing? Does the rhythm build on itself or stay at an even pace? How does that structure relate to the content?
* How is punctuation used? Is there anything unusual about it? What about capitalization?
* How is repetition used within the passage? What words are repeated? Why are they repeated?
* How many *types* of writing are in the passage? (e.g., narration, description, argument, dialogue, rhymed or alliterative poetry inserted into a prose passage.)
* How does the passage make us react to or think about any characters or events within the narrative?
* How is point of view used in the passage? Who is speaking and to whom? If we are dealing with a third-person narrator, does he or she have a partial or omniscient viewpoint? How does that viewpoint help or hinder the reader's comprehension?
* How are characters and their conflicts developing and changing?
* How are metaphors, similes, symbols, or figures of speech used? How do they expand meaning?
* Is there one controlling metaphor or image? How might that be significant?

**Evaluate Importance—The WHY**

* How does this passage reveal or contribute to the tone and/or theme?
* How could this passage symbolize something in the entire work? Could this passage serve as a microcosm, a little picture, of what's taking place in the whole work?
* Why is it important for the reader to know what you have just analyzed and explained?
* How does the passage you have chosen help us understand the story, poem, or play more completely
* What is left out or silenced? What would you expect the speaker to say that the speaker seems to have avoided or ignored? What could the author have done differently—and what’s the effect of the current choice?

***(Please keep this in a safe place in your notebook. It is a resource for you to consult all year long.)***